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ABSTRACT

A review was conducted to identify improvements in the public postsecondary vocational education system in Florida that could save the state money. The study found that 37 percent of adult vocational education programs were poor performers in fiscal year 1992-93, costing the state approximately $13.1 million while either producing few completers or producing completers who fared poorly in the job market. In addition, duplicative programs that had low placement rates, trained students for non-targeted jobs, or had low enrollment cost the state approximately $70.9 million in 1993-94. Poor-performing programs meet neither the students' employment goals nor the state's economic development goals, and eliminating or reducing state funding for these programs could achieve savings from reduced administrative, teaching, and facility costs. In addition, the consolidation or elimination or duplicative programs in the same region or county could achieve cost savings. The following recommendations were made: (1) the legislature should increase the use of performance-based incentive funding, such as employment outcomes; (2) the legislature should direct the educational regulators to develop criteria to eliminate poor-performing programs and duplicate program offerings; and (3) the State Board of Education should establish standard program lengths for vocational certificate programs and ensure the implementation of the rule for associate degree programs for uniformity and consistency statewide. (KC)

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STATE OF FLORIDA

Report No. 95-25

Office of
Program Policy Analysis
And Government Accountability

James L. Carpenter
Interim Director

January 9, 1996

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REVIEW OF POSTSECONDARY VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS

PURPOSE OF REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to identify improvements in the public postsecondary vocational education system that could save the state money. Specifically, our objectives were to: identify vocational programs that produced few completers or whose completers faired poorly in the job market; identify duplicative offerings of programs by two or more schools in the same region or county; and, identify vocational certificate programs that exceed the recommended number of hours.

BACKGROUND

Florida invests over $1 billion each year in work force development. The public postsecondary vocational education system, the largest provider of vocational training, is intended to increase students' vocational skills needed to enter and progress in the workforce. State general revenue and student fees provide the majority (94%) of funding for adult vocational certificate and Associate of Science (A.S.) degree programs that cost $393.7 million in 1993-94. (See Exhibit 1.) Vocational certificate programs, delivered by vocational-technical centers and community colleges, are measured in clock hours of instruction. Examples of vocational certificate programs include computer operations, law enforcement, and welding. Certificate program lengths range from 24 clock hours for Mine Safety and Health to 2,850 clock hours for Court Reporting. Community colleges offer A.S. degree programs that are measured in student semester hours. Program lengths for these programs range from 60 student semester hours for Postal Service Management to 90 student semester hours for Midwifery.

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Exhibit 1: Adult Vocational Education Programs (1993-94)

Program	Number of Students	Number of Institutions Offering Programs	Total Program Costs (in Millions)
District Voc-Tech Certificate	112,981	46	$223.5
Community College:			
Certificate	21,007	20	28.2
A.S. Degree	60,293	28	142.0
Total	194,281	74[1]	$393.7

[1] The total number of community colleges in the state is 28 and the total number of vocational centers is 46.

Source: Department of Education and Division of Community Colleges.

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Thirty-seven (37) percent of all adult vocational education programs were poor performers in fiscal year 1992-93.[1] These programs cost the state approximately $13.1 million and produced few completers or the completers faired poorly in the job market.

We found vocational programs that produced few completers or whose completers faired poorly in the job market. To analyze vocational programs, we used Florida Education Training and Placement Information Program (FETPIP) employment data on 1992-93 program completers. For our analysis we selected criteria that would identify programs performing below minimal levels. We defined poor-performing programs as programs with five or fewer completers statewide or that met at least one of the following employment criteria during October through December 1993:[2]

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- Less than 50% of completers were employed at any point in time during the quarter; or
- Less than 25% of completers were employed full-time for 11 of 12 weeks in the quarter.

Of the 347 vocational programs included in our analysis, 127 (37%) programs met our definition of a poor-performing program. Statewide, 84 programs had five or fewer completers and 43 additional programs met at least one of our criteria for poor performing programs. These 127 programs had 1,604 completers.

We estimate that $13.1 million was spent on these poor-performing programs.[3] The Department of Education's (DOE) recent restructuring of vocational programs eliminated two programs in 1994 and three programs in 1995 that we identified as poor-performing.

[1] 1993-94 data on program completers was not available by program. Therefore, the most recent data available for our analysis was for fiscal year 1992-93.

[2] We included all employment outcomes of program completers but not students who left the program prior to completion.

[3] This amount represents the statewide average cost per completer multiplied by the number of completers of poor-performing programs.

Duplicative Program Offerings

Vocational programs offered by two or more schools in the same region or county may serve a useful purpose. However, duplicative offerings of programs that have low placement rates, train students for non-targeted jobs, or have low enrollment are of questionable benefit. In 1993-94, these duplicative programs cost an estimated $70.9 million.[4]

There are several regions in the state served by both a community college and one or more vocational technical centers. The Legislature requires cooperative agreements between community colleges and school districts regarding certificate program offerings. However, these cooperative agreements focus on student transfer of credit across institutions and do not delineate the certificate programs each institution will offer. The law requiring cooperative agreements has not prevented program offerings that our analysis shows may be unnecessary.

There are also several counties that have more than one vocational-technical center. In these counties we found more than one school offered the same program.

To assess whether these duplicative program offerings appear unnecessary, we considered the following criteria:

- Low Placement - placement rates for completers are below the state average;
- Training for Non-Targeted Jobs - programs that do not train students for jobs targeted by the Occupational Estimating Conference; and
- Low Enrollment - 15 or less students enrolled.

In addition to the above criteria, we examined the extent to which programs considered more costly by DOE were duplicated. Such duplication was not significant, but the need for more than one high cost program within a region or county may need to be considered.

Duplication in Vocational Programs Offered by Community Colleges and Vocational-Technical Centers. During 1993-94, community colleges and vocational-technical centers that served the same region offered some duplicative vocational certificate programs. Statewide, duplication in the vocational program offerings occurred 47 times. For example, a community college and two vocational-technical centers in the same region all offered welding. We identified 41 occurrences of duplication that met at least one of the criteria of low placement rates, training for non-targeted jobs, and/or low enrollment. (See Exhibits 2 and 4.) The criteria most frequently met was training for non-targeted jobs which occurred 27 times. The estimated cost of these duplicative programs was $6.1 million in 1993-94.

Duplication in Programs Offered by Vocational-Technical Centers. There are eight counties with more than one vocational-technical center. Using the most recent data on program offerings (1993-94), we found duplication in the vocational program offerings occurred 199 times. We identified 151 occurrences of duplication that met at least one of

[4] This amount represents the average cost per student statewide multiplied by the number of students enrolled in the duplicative programs.

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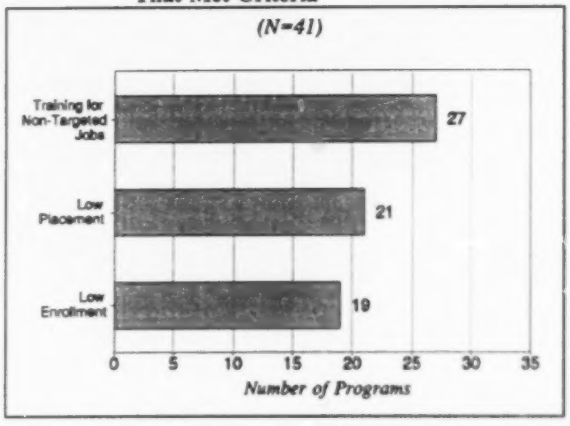
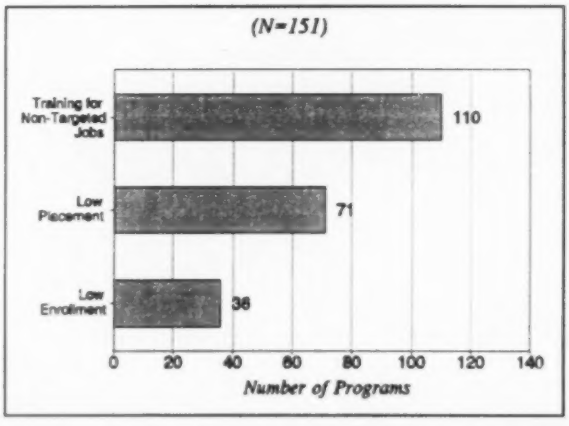
our criteria of low placement rates, training for non-targeted jobs, and/or low enrollment. (See Exhibits 3 and 4.) Again, the criteria most frequently met was training for non-targeted jobs which occurred 110 times. The estimated cost of these duplicative programs was $64.8 million in 1993-94.

Exhibit 2: Community Colleges and Vocational-Technical Centers in the Same Region: Number of Duplicative Program Offerings That Met Criteria



Source: Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability analysis of Department of Education 1993-94 vocational data.

Exhibit 3: Vocational-Technical Centers in the Same County: Number of Duplicative Program Offerings That Met Criteria



Source: Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability analysis of Department of Education 1993-94 vocational data.

Exhibit 4: Occurrences of Duplicative Program Offerings That Met Our Criteria by Vocational Area

Vocational Area	Duplication of Program Offerings Between: CC and VT in the Same Region	Duplication of Program Offerings Between: VTs in the Same County
Agriculture	0	3
Business	2	48
Health	9	25
Home Economics	2	19
Industrial	20	52
Marketing	1	3
Public Service	7	1
Total Number of Occurrences	41	151

CC = Community College
VT = Vocational Technical Center

Source: Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability analysis of Department of Education 1993-94 vocational data.

OBSERVATIONS

Funding for vocational education is based on the number of students enrolled in the program; thus, programs are funded even if they are poor-performing programs. Basing funding on performance may eliminate the problems cited in this report. The state started a voluntary incentive program, referred to as the Performance Based Incentive Fund (PBIF), to encourage vocational training that leads to employment in targeted fields that are high-wage/high-skill (see OPPAGA Report No. 95-16). Participating vocational-technical centers and community colleges earn a portion of their funding based on student outcomes in targeted fields. This program has the potential to remedy many of the problems outlined in this report if a greater proportion of vocational funding is awarded through PBIF.

In addition to the PBIF program, DOE and the Division of Community Colleges are developing or are using other mechanisms to improve the performance of vocational programs. Program "exit points" where students could leave the programs prior to completion, but still obtain marketable skills in a vocational area are being identified. Vocational programs may be redesigned to allow for multiple exit points for students.

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In addition, both DOE and the Division of Community Colleges employ a program review process and accreditation reviews to evaluate their vocational programs. In addition to developing mechanisms to improve program performance, existing methods such as program reviews may need to be strengthened.

We further noted that DOE has developed recommended program lengths that identify the clock hours needed to teach minimum competencies for most vocational programs. Our analysis comparing actual program lengths to recommended lengths for programs with the same classification code identified wide variations statewide in clock hours for the same program. For example, one program was offered at lengths ranging from 66 hours to 2,948 hours. Nine institutions offered the program below the recommended length, 31 institutions offered the program above the recommended length, and 2 institutions offered the program at the recommended length of 900 hours. These variations highlight a lack of consistency and uniformity in vocational certificate programs that may affect the credibility of some certificate programs.

The State Board of Community Colleges recently adopted a rule to establish lengths for A.S. degree programs (to be implemented by Fall 1996). As of December 1995, the State Board of Education has not adopted this rule.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Poor-performing programs meet neither the students' employment goals nor the state's economic development goals. Eliminating or reducing state funding for these programs could achieve savings from reduced administrative, teaching, and facility costs. In addition, we found many duplicative programs in the same region or county that may be unnecessary. Consolidation or elimination of such programs could achieve cost savings. However, such savings would be less than the total program expenditures because these students may continue to need other vocational training.

Therefore, we recommend that the Legislature:

- Increase the use of performance-based incentive funding, such as employment outcomes. This will better ensure that only those programs that meet the students' and the state's employment goals are funded; and
- Direct the Department of Education and the State Board of Community Colleges, in consultation with the Jobs and Education Partnership, to develop criteria to eliminate poor-performing programs and duplicative program offerings that appear unnecessary.

To protect the credibility of vocational programs, we recommend the State Board of Education:

- Establish standard program lengths for vocational certificate programs and ensure the implementation of the rule for A.S. degree programs for uniformity and consistency statewide.

Agency Response

The Secretary of the Department of Education agreed with the overall concepts and observations of the report. However, he disagreed with several criteria used to determine poor performance and unnecessary duplication.

The Executive Director of the Florida State Board of Community Colleges described processes that the Board uses to obtain feedback regarding programs' performances.

The complete responses are a public record and are available upon request.

This project was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and rules adopted by the Auditor General. Appropriate personnel, auditing and evaluation techniques were used in the conduct of this project. This report is presented in accordance with Section 11.45(7)(a), Florida Statutes.

Review questions may be directed to Jane Fee, Director, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

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